BOOK IV.

RETROSPECTIVE.

I.

In their precise tracings-out and subtile causations, the strongest and fieriest emotions of life defy all analytical insight. We see the cloud, and feel its bolt; but meteorology only idly essays a critical scrutiny as to how that cloud became charged, and how this bolt so stuns. The metaphysical writers confess, that the most impressive, sudden, and overwhelming event, as well as the minutest, is but the product of an infinite series of infinitely involved and untraceable foregoing occurrences. Just so with every motion of the heart. Why this cheek kindles with a noble enthusiasm; why that lip curls in scorn; these are things not wholly imputable to the immediate apparent cause, which is only one link in the chain; but to a long line of dependencies whose further part is lost in the mid-regions of the impalpable air.

Idle then would it be to attempt by any winding way so to penetrate into the heart, and memory, and inmost life, and nature of Pierre, as to show why it was that a piece of intelligence which, in the natural course of things, many amiable gentlemen, both young and old, have been known to receive with a momentary feeling of surprise, and then a little

curiosity to know more, and at last an entire unconcern; idle would it be, to attempt to show how to Pierre it rolled down on his soul like melted lava, and left so deep a deposit of desolation, that all his subsequent endeavors never restored the original temples to the soil, nor all his culture completely revived its buried bloom.

But some random hints may suffice to deprive a little of its strangeness, that tumultuous mood, into which so small a note had thrown him.

There had long stood a shrine in the fresh-foliaged heart of Pierre, up to which he ascended by many tableted steps of remembrance; and around which annually he had hung fresh wreaths of a sweet and holy affection. Made one green bower of at last, by such successive votive offerings of his being; this shrine seemed, and was indeed, a place for the celebration of a chastened joy, rather than for any melancholy rites. But though thus mantled, and tangled with garlands, this shrine was of marble--a niched pillar, deemed solid and eternal, and from whose top radiated all those innumerable sculptured scrolls and branches, which supported the entire one-pillared temple of his moral life; as in some beautiful gothic oratories, one central pillar, trunk-like, upholds the roof. In this shrine, in this niche of this pillar, stood the perfect marble form of his departed father; without blemish, unclouded, snow-white, and serene; Pierre's fond personification of perfect human goodness and virtue. Before this shrine, Pierre poured out the fullness of all young life's most reverential thoughts and beliefs. Not to God

had Pierre ever gone in his heart, unless by ascending the steps of that shrine, and so making it the vestibule of his abstractest religion.

Blessed and glorified in his tomb beyond Prince Mausolus is that mortal sire, who, after an honorable, pure course of life, dies, and is buried, as in a choice fountain, in the filial breast of a tender-hearted and intellectually appreciative child. For at that period, the Solomonic insights have not poured their turbid tributaries into the pure-flowing well of the childish life. Rare preservative virtue, too, have those heavenly waters. Thrown into that fountain, all sweet recollections become marbleized; so that things which in themselves were evanescent, thus became unchangeable and eternal. So, some rare waters in Derbyshire will petrify birds'-nests. But if fate preserves the father to a later time, too often the filial obsequies are less profound; the canonization less ethereal. The eye-expanded boy perceives, or vaguely thinks he perceives, slight specks and flaws in the character he once so wholly reverenced.

When Pierre was twelve years old, his father had died, leaving behind him, in the general voice of the world, a marked reputation as a gentleman and a Christian; in the heart of his wife, a green memory of many healthy days of unclouded and joyful wedded life, and in the inmost soul of Pierre, the impression of a bodily form of rare manly beauty and benignity, only rivaled by the supposed perfect mould in which his virtuous heart had been cast. Of pensive evenings, by the wide winter fire, or in summer, in the southern piazza, when that mystical

night-silence so peculiar to the country would summon up in the minds of Pierre and his mother, long trains of the images of the past; leading all that spiritual procession, majestically and holily walked the venerated form of the departed husband and father. Then their talk would be reminiscent and serious, but sweet; and again, and again, still deep and deeper, was stamped in Pierre's soul the cherished conceit, that his virtuous father, so beautiful on earth, was now uncorruptibly sainted in heaven. So choicely, and in some degree, secludedly nurtured, Pierre, though now arrived at the age of nineteen, had never yet become so thoroughly initiated into that darker, though truer aspect of things, which an entire residence in the city from the earliest period of life, almost inevitably engraves upon the mind of any keenly observant and reflective youth of Pierre's present years. So that up to this period, in his breast, all remained as it had been; and to Pierre, his father's shrine seemed spotless, and still new as the marble of the tomb of him of Arimathea.

Judge, then, how all-desolating and withering the blast, that for Pierre, in one night, stripped his holiest shrine of all over-laid bloom, and buried the mild statue of the saint beneath the prostrated ruins of the soul's temple itself.

II.

As the vine flourishes, and the grape empurples close up to the very

walls and muzzles of cannoned Ehrenbreitstein; so do the sweetest joys of life grow in the very jaws of its perils.

But is life, indeed, a thing for all infidel levities, and we, its misdeemed beneficiaries, so utterly fools and infatuate, that what we take to be our strongest tower of delight, only stands at the caprice of the minutest event--the falling of a leaf, the hearing of a voice, or the receipt of one little bit of paper scratched over with a few small characters by a sharpened feather? Are we so entirely insecure, that that casket, wherein we have placed our holiest and most final joy, and which we have secured by a lock of infinite deftness; can that casket be picked and desecrated at the merest stranger's touch, when we think that we alone hold the only and chosen key?

Pierre! thou art foolish; rebuild--no, not that, for thy shrine still stands; it stands, Pierre, firmly stands; smellest thou not its yet undeparted, embowering bloom? Such a note as thine can be easily enough written, Pierre; impostors are not unknown in this curious world; or the brisk novelist, Pierre, will write thee fifty such notes, and so steal gushing tears from his reader's eyes; even as thy note so strangely made thine own manly eyes so arid; so glazed, and so arid, Pierre--foolish Pierre!

Oh! mock not the poniarded heart. The stabbed man knows the steel; prate not to him that it is only a tickling feather. Feels he not the interior gash? What does this blood on my vesture? and what does this pang in my

soul?

And here again, not unreasonably, might invocations go up to those Three Weird Ones, that tend Life's loom. Again we might ask them, What threads were those, oh, ye Weird Ones, that ye wove in the years foregone; that now to Pierre, they so unerringly conduct electric presentiments, that his woe is woe, his father no more a saint, and Isabel a sister indeed?

Ah, fathers and mothers! all the world round, be heedful,--give heed! Thy little one may not now comprehend the meaning of those words and those signs, by which, in its innocent presence, thou thinkest to disguise the sinister thing ye would hint. Not now he knows; not very much even of the externals he consciously remarks; but if, in after-life, Fate puts the chemic key of the cipher into his hands; then how swiftly and how wonderfully, he reads all the obscurest and most obliterate inscriptions he finds in his memory; yea, and rummages himself all over, for still hidden writings to read. Oh, darkest lessons of Life have thus been read; all faith in Virtue been murdered, and youth gives itself up to an infidel scorn.

But not thus, altogether, was it now with Pierre; yet so like, in some points, that the above true warning may not misplacedly stand.

His father had died of a fever; and, as is not uncommon in such maladies, toward his end, he at intervals lowly wandered in his mind. At such times, by unobserved, but subtle arts, the devoted family

attendants, had restrained his wife from being present at his side. But little Pierre, whose fond, filial love drew him ever to that bed; they heeded not innocent little Pierre, when his father was delirious; and so, one evening, when the shadows intermingled with the curtains; and all the chamber was hushed; and Pierre but dimly saw his father's face; and the fire on the hearth lay in a broken temple of wonderful coals; then a strange, plaintive, infinitely pitiable, low voice, stole forth from the testered bed; and Pierre heard,--"My daughter! my daughter!"

"He wanders again," said the nurse.

"Dear, dear father!" sobbed the child--"thou hast not a daughter, but here is thy own little Pierre."

But again the unregardful voice in the bed was heard; and now in a sudden, pealing wail,--"My daughter!--God! God!--my daughter!"

The child snatched the dying man's hand; it faintly grew to his grasp; but on the other side of the bed, the other hand now also emptily lifted

itself and emptily caught, as if at some other childish fingers. Then both hands dropped on the sheet; and in the twinkling shadows of the evening little Pierre seemed to see, that while the hand which he held wore a faint, feverish flush, the other empty one was ashy white as a leper's.

"It is past," whispered the nurse, "he will wander so no more now till midnight,--that is his wont." And then, in her heart, she wondered how it was, that so excellent a gentleman, and so thoroughly good a man, should wander so ambiguously in his mind; and trembled to think of that mysterious thing in the soul, which seems to acknowledge no human jurisdiction, but in spite of the individual's own innocent self, will still dream horrid dreams, and mutter unmentionable thoughts; and into Pierre's awe-stricken, childish soul, there entered a kindred, though still more nebulous conceit. But it belonged to the spheres of the impalpable ether; and the child soon threw other and sweeter remembrances over it, and covered it up; and at last, it was blended with all other dim things, and imaginings of dimness; and so, seemed to survive to no real life in Pierre. But though through many long years the henbane showed no leaves in his soul; yet the sunken seed was there: and the first glimpse of Isabel's letter caused it to spring forth, as by magic. Then, again, the long-hushed, plaintive and infinitely pitiable voice was heard,--"My daughter! my daughter!" followed by the compunctious "God! God!" And to Pierre, once again the empty hand lifted itself, and once again the ashy hand fell.

III.

In the cold courts of justice the dull head demands oaths, and holy writ proofs; but in the warm halls of the heart one single, untestified memory's spark shall suffice to enkindle such a blaze of evidence, that

all the corners of conviction are as suddenly lighted up as a midnight city by a burning building, which on every side whirls its reddened brands.

In a locked, round-windowed closet connecting with the chamber of Pierre, and whither he had always been wont to go, in those sweetly awful hours, when the spirit crieth to the spirit, Come into solitude with me, twin-brother; come away: a secret have I; let me whisper it to thee aside; in this closet, sacred to the Tadmore privacies and repose of the sometimes solitary Pierre, there hung, by long cords from the cornice, a small portrait in oil, before which Pierre had many a time trancedly stood. Had this painting hung in any annual public exhibition, and in its turn been described in print by the casual glancing critics, they would probably have described it thus, and truthfully: "An impromptu portrait of a fine-looking, gay-hearted, youthful gentleman. He is lightly, and, as it were, airily and but grazingly seated in, or rather flittingly tenanting an old-fashioned chair of Malacca. One arm confining his hat and cane is loungingly thrown over the back of the chair, while the fingers of the other hand play with his gold watch-seal and key. The free-templed head is sideways turned, with a peculiarly bright, and care-free, morning expression. He seems as if just dropped in for a visit upon some familiar acquaintance. Altogether, the painting is exceedingly clever and cheerful; with a fine, off-handed expression about it. Undoubtedly a portrait, and no fancy-piece; and, to hazard a vague conjecture, by an amateur."

So bright, and so cheerful then; so trim, and so young; so singularly healthful, and handsome; what subtile element could so steep this whole portrait, that, to the wife of the original, it was namelessly unpleasant and repelling? The mother of Pierre could never abide this picture which she had always asserted did signally belie her husband. Her fond memories of the departed refused to hang one single wreath around it. It is not he, she would emphatically and almost indignantly exclaim, when more urgently besought to reveal the cause for so unreasonable a dissent from the opinion of nearly all the other connections and relatives of the deceased. But the portrait which she held to do justice to her husband, correctly to convey his features in detail, and more especially their truest, and finest, and noblest combined expression; this portrait was a much larger one, and in the great drawing-room below occupied the most conspicuous and honorable place on the wall.

Even to Pierre these two paintings had always seemed strangely dissimilar. And as the larger one had been painted many years after the other, and therefore brought the original pretty nearly within his own childish recollections; therefore, he himself could not but deem it by far the more truthful and life-like presentation of his father. So that the mere preference of his mother, however strong, was not at all surprising to him, but rather coincided with his own conceit. Yet not for this, must the other portrait be so decidedly rejected. Because, in the first place, there was a difference in time, and some difference of costume to be considered, and the wide difference of the styles of the

respective artiste, and the wide difference of those respective, semi-reflected, ideal faces, which, even in the presence of the original, a spiritual artist will rather choose to draw from than from the fleshy face, however brilliant and fine. Moreover, while the larger portrait was that of a middle-aged, married man, and seemed to possess all the nameless and slightly portly tranquillities, incident to that condition when a felicitous one; the smaller portrait painted a brisk, unentangled, young bachelor, gayly ranging up and down in the world; light-hearted, and a very little bladish perhaps; and charged to the lips with the first uncloying morning fullness and freshness of life. Here, certainly, large allowance was to be made in any careful, candid estimation of these portraits. To Pierre this conclusion had become well-nigh irresistible, when he placed side by side two portraits of himself; one taken in his early childhood, a frocked and belted boy of four years old; and the other, a grown youth of sixteen. Except an indestructible, all-surviving something in the eyes and on the temples, Pierre could hardly recognize the loud-laughing boy in the tall, and pensively smiling youth. If a few years, then, can have in me made all this difference, why not in my father? thought Pierre.

Besides all this, Pierre considered the history, and, so to speak, the family legend of the smaller painting. In his fifteenth year, it was made a present to him by an old maiden aunt, who resided in the city, and who cherished the memory of Pierre's father, with all that wonderful amaranthine devotion which an advanced maiden sister ever feels for the idea of a beloved younger brother, now dead and irrevocably gone. As the

only child of that brother, Pierre was an object of the warmest and most extravagant attachment on the part of this lonely aunt, who seemed to see, transformed into youth once again, the likeness, and very soul of her brother, in the fair, inheriting brow of Pierre. Though the portrait we speak of was inordinately prized by her, yet at length the strict canon of her romantic and imaginative love asserted the portrait to be Pierre's--for Pierre was not only his father's only child, but his namesake--so soon as Pierre should be old enough to value aright so holy and inestimable a treasure. She had accordingly sent it to him, trebly boxed, and finally covered with a water-proof cloth; and it was delivered at Saddle Meadows, by an express, confidential messenger, an old gentleman of leisure, once her forlorn, because rejected gallant, but now her contented, and chatty neighbor. Henceforth, before a gold-framed and gold-lidded ivory miniature,--a fraternal gift--aunt Dorothea now offered up her morning and her evening rites, to the memory of the noblest and handsomest of brothers. Yet an annual visit to the far closet of Pierre--no slight undertaking now for one so stricken in years, and every way infirm--attested the earnestness of that strong sense of duty, that painful renunciation of self, which had induced her voluntarily to part with the precious memorial.

IV.

"Tell me, aunt," the child Pierre had early said to her, long before the portrait became his--"tell me, aunt, how this chair-portrait, as you

call it, was painted;--who painted it?--whose chair was this?--have you the chair now?--I don't see it in your room here;--what is papa looking at so strangely?--I should like to know now, what papa was thinking of, then. Do, now, dear aunt, tell me all about this picture, so that when it is mine, as you promise me, I shall know its whole history."

"Sit down, then, and be very still and attentive, my dear child," said aunt Dorothea; while she a little averted her head, and tremulously and inaccurately sought her pocket, till little Pierre cried--"Why, aunt, the story of the picture is not in any little book, is it, that you are going to take out and read to me?"

"My handkerchief, my child."

"Why, aunt, here it is, at your elbow; here, on the table; here, aunt; take it, do; Oh, don't tell me any thing about the picture, now; I won't hear it."

"Be still, my darling Pierre," said his aunt, taking the handkerchief, "draw the curtain a little, dearest; the light hurts my eyes. Now, go into the closet, and bring me my dark shawl;--take your time.--There; thank you, Pierre; now sit down again, and I will begin.--The picture was painted long ago, my child; you were not born then."

"Not born?" cried little Pierre.

"Not born," said his aunt.

"Well, go on, aunt; but don't tell me again that once upon a time I was not little Pierre at all, and yet my father was alive. Go on, aunt,--do, do!"

"Why, how nervous you are getting, my child;--Be patient; I am very old, Pierre; and old people never like to be hurried."

"Now, my own dear Aunt Dorothea, do forgive me this once, and go on with your story."

"When your poor father was quite a young man, my child, and was on one of his long autumnal visits to his friends in this city, he was rather intimate at times with a cousin of his, Ralph Winwood, who was about his own age,--a fine youth he was, too, Pierre."

"I never saw him, aunt; pray, where is he now?" interrupted Pierre;--"does he live in the country, now, as mother and I do?"

"Yes, my child; but a far-away, beautiful country, I hope;--he's in heaven, I trust."

"Dead," sighed little Pierre--"go on, aunt."

"Now, cousin Ralph had a great love for painting, my child; and he

spent many hours in a room, hung all round with pictures and portraits; and there he had his easel and brushes; and much liked to paint his friends, and hang their faces on his walls; so that when all alone by himself, he yet had plenty of company, who always wore their best expressions to him, and never once ruffled him, by ever getting cross or ill-natured, little Pierre. Often, he had besought your father to sit to him; saying, that his silent circle of friends would never be complete, till your father consented to join them. But in those days, my child, your father was always in motion. It was hard for me to get him to stand still, while I tied his cravat; for he never came to any one but me for that. So he was always putting off, and putting off cousin Ralph. 'Some other time, cousin; not to-day;--to-morrow, perhaps;--or next week;'--and so, at last cousin Ralph began to despair. But I'll catch him yet, cried sly cousin Ralph. So now he said nothing more to your father about the matter of painting him; but every pleasant morning kept his easel and brushes and every thing in readiness; so as to be ready the first moment your father should chance to drop in upon him from his long strolls; for it was now and then your father's wont to pay flying little visits to cousin Ralph in his painting-room.--But, my child, you may draw back the curtain now--it's getting very dim here, seems to me."

"Well, I thought so all along, aunt," said little Pierre, obeying; "but didn't you say the light hurt your eyes."

"But it does not now, little Pierre."

"Well, well; go on, go on, aunt; you can't think how interested I am," said little Pierre, drawing his stool close up to the quilted satin hem of his good Aunt Dorothea's dress.

"I will, my child. But first let me tell you, that about this time there arrived in the port, a cabin-full of French emigrants of quality;--poor people, Pierre, who were forced to fly from their native land, because of the cruel, blood-shedding times there. But you have read all that in the little history I gave you, a good while ago."

"I know all about it;--the French Revolution," said little Pierre.

"What a famous little scholar you are, my dear child,"--said Aunt Dorothea, faintly smiling--"among those poor, but noble emigrants, there was a beautiful young girl, whose sad fate afterward made a great noise in the city, and made many eyes to weep, but in vain, for she never was heard of any more."

"How? how? aunt;--I don't understand;--did she disappear then, aunt?"

"I was a little before my story, child. Yes, she did disappear, and never was heard of again; but that was afterward, some time afterward, my child. I am very sure it was; I could take my oath of that, Pierre."

"Why, dear aunt," said little Pierre, "how earnestly you talk--after what? your voice is getting very strange; do now;--don't talk that way;

you frighten me so, aunt."

"Perhaps it is this bad cold I have to-day; it makes my voice a little hoarse, I fear, Pierre. But I will try and not talk so hoarsely again. Well, my child, some time before this beautiful young lady disappeared, indeed it was only shortly after the poor emigrants landed, your father made her acquaintance; and with many other humane gentlemen of the city, provided for the wants of the strangers, for they were very poor indeed, having been stripped of every thing, save a little trifling jewelry, which could not go very far. At last, the friends of your father endeavored to dissuade him from visiting these people so much; they were fearful that as the young lady was so very beautiful, and a little inclined to be intriguing--so some said--your father might be tempted to marry her; which would not have been a wise thing in him; for though the young lady might have been very beautiful, and good-hearted, yet no one on this side the water certainly knew her history; and she was a foreigner; and would not have made so suitable and excellent a match for your father as your dear mother afterward did, my child. But, for myself, I--who always knew your father very well in all his intentions, and he was very confidential with me, too--I, for my part, never credited that he would do so unwise a thing as marry the strange young lady. At any rate, he at last discontinued his visits to the emigrants; and it was after this that the young lady disappeared. Some said that she must have voluntarily but secretly returned into her own country; and others declared that she must have been kidnapped by French emissaries; for, after her disappearance, rumor began to hint that she

was of the noblest birth, and some ways allied to the royal family; and then, again, there were some who shook their heads darkly, and muttered of drownings, and other dark things; which one always hears hinted when people disappear, and no one can find them. But though your father and many other gentlemen moved heaven and earth to find trace of her, yet, as I said before, my child, she never re-appeared."

"The poor French lady!" sighed little Pierre. "Aunt, I'm afraid she was murdered."

"Poor lady, there is no telling," said his aunt. "But listen, for I am coming to the picture again. Now, at the time your father was so often visiting the emigrants, my child, cousin Ralph was one of those who a little fancied that your father was courting her; but cousin Ralph being a quiet young man, and a scholar, not well acquainted with what is wise, or what is foolish in the great world; cousin Ralph would not have been at all mortified had your father really wedded with the refugee young lady. So vainly thinking, as I told you, that your father was courting her, he fancied it would be a very fine thing if he could paint your father as her wooer; that is, paint him just after his coming from his daily visits to the emigrants. So he watched his chance; every thing being ready in his painting-room, as I told you before; and one morning, sure enough, in dropt your father from his walk. But before he came into the room, cousin Ralph had spied him from the window; and when your father entered, cousin Ralph had the sitting-chair ready drawn out, back of his easel, but still fronting toward him, and pretended to be

very busy painting. He said to your father--'Glad to see you, cousin Pierre; I am just about something here; sit right down there now, and tell me the news; and I'll sally out with you presently. And tell us something of the emigrants, cousin Pierre,' he slyly added--wishing, you see, to get your father's thoughts running that supposed wooing way, so that he might catch some sort of corresponding expression you see, little Pierre."

"I don't know that I precisely understand, aunt; but go on, I am so interested; do go on, dear aunt."

"Well, by many little cunning shifts and contrivances, cousin Ralph kept your father there sitting, and sitting in the chair, rattling and rattling away, and so self-forgetful too, that he never heeded that all the while sly cousin Ralph was painting and painting just as fast as ever he could; and only making believe laugh at your father's wit; in short, cousin Ralph was stealing his portrait, my child."

"Not stealing it, I hope," said Pierre, "that would be very wicked."

"Well, then, we won't call it stealing, since I am sure that cousin Ralph kept your father all the time off from him, and so, could not have possibly picked his pocket, though indeed, he slyly picked his portrait, so to speak. And if indeed it was stealing, or any thing of that sort; yet seeing how much comfort that portrait has been to me, Pierre, and how much it will yet be to you, I hope; I think we must very heartily

forgive cousin Ralph, for what he then did."

"Yes, I think we must indeed," chimed in little Pierre, now eagerly eying the very portrait in question, which hung over the mantle.

"Well, by catching your father two or three times more in that way, cousin Ralph at last finished the painting; and when it was all framed, and every way completed, he would have surprised your father by hanging it boldly up in his room among his other portraits, had not your father one morning suddenly come to him--while, indeed, the very picture itself was placed face down on a table and cousin Ralph fixing the cord to it--came to him, and frightened cousin Ralph by quietly saying, that now that he thought of it, it seemed to him that cousin Ralph had been playing tricks with him; but he hoped it was not so. 'What do you mean?' said cousin Ralph, a little flurried. 'You have not been hanging my portrait up here, have you, cousin Ralph?' said your father, glancing along the walls. 'I'm glad I don't see it. It is my whim, cousin Ralph,--and perhaps it is a very silly one,--but if you have been lately painting my portrait, I want you to destroy it; at any rate, don't show it to any one, keep it out of sight. What's that you have there, cousin Ralph?'

"Cousin Ralph was now more and more fluttered; not knowing what to make--as indeed, to this day, I don't completely myself--of your father's strange manner. But he rallied, and said--'This, cousin Pierre, is a secret portrait I have here; you must be aware that we

portrait-painters are sometimes called upon to paint such. I, therefore, can not show it to you, or tell you any thing about it.'

"'Have you been painting my portrait or not, cousin Ralph?' said your father, very suddenly and pointedly.

"'I have painted nothing that looks as you there look,' said cousin Ralph, evasively, observing in your father's face a fierce-like expression, which he had never seen there before. And more than that, your father could not get from him."

"And what then?" said little Pierre.

"Why not much, my child; only your father never so much as caught one glimpse of that picture; indeed, never knew for certain, whether there was such a painting in the world. Cousin Ralph secretly gave it to me, knowing how tenderly I loved your father; making me solemnly promise never to expose it anywhere where your father could ever see it, or any way hear of it. This promise I faithfully kept; and it was only after your dear father's death, that I hung it in my chamber. There, Pierre, you now have the story of the chair-portrait."

"And a very strange one it is," said Pierre--"and so interesting, I shall never forget it, aunt."

"I hope you never will, my child. Now ring the bell, and we will have a

little fruit-cake, and I will take a glass of wine, Pierre;--do you hear, my child?--the bell--ring it. Why, what do you do standing there, Pierre?"

"Why didn't papa want to have cousin Ralph paint his picture, aunt?"

"How these children's minds do run!" exclaimed old aunt Dorothea staring at little Pierre in amazement--"That indeed is more than I can tell you, little Pierre. But cousin Ralph had a foolish fancy about it. He used to tell me, that being in your father's room some few days after the last scene I described, he noticed there a very wonderful work on Physiognomy, as they call it, in which the strangest and shadowiest rules were laid down for detecting people's innermost secrets by studying their faces. And so, foolish cousin Ralph always flattered himself, that the reason your father did not want his portrait taken was, because he was secretly in love with the French young lady, and did not want his secret published in a portrait; since the wonderful work on Physiognomy had, as it were, indirectly warned him against running that risk. But cousin Ralph being such a retired and solitary sort of a youth, he always had such curious whimsies about things. For my part, I don't believe your father ever had any such ridiculous ideas on the subject. To be sure, I myself can not tell you why he did not want his picture taken; but when you get to be as old as I am, little Pierre, you will find that every one, even the best of us, at times, is apt to act very queerly and unaccountably; indeed some things we do, we can not entirely explain the reason of, even to ourselves, little Pierre. But

you will know all about these strange matters by and by."

"I hope I shall, aunt," said little Pierre--"But, dear aunt, I thought Marten was to bring in some fruit-cake?"

"Ring the bell for him, then, my child."

"Oh! I forgot," said little Pierre, doing her bidding.

By-and-by, while the aunt was sipping her wine; and the boy eating his cake, and both their eyes were fixed on the portrait in question; little Pierre, pushing his stool nearer the picture exclaimed--"Now, aunt, did papa really look exactly like that? Did you ever see him in that same buff vest, and huge-figured neckcloth? I remember the seal and key, pretty well; and it was only a week ago that I saw mamma take them out of a little locked drawer in her wardrobe--but I don't remember the queer whiskers; nor the buff vest; nor the huge white-figured neckcloth; did you ever see papa in that very neckcloth, aunt?"

"My child, it was I that chose the stuff for that neckcloth; yes, and hemmed it for him, and worked P. G. in one corner; but that aint in the picture. It is an excellent likeness, my child, neckcloth and all; as he looked at that time. Why, little Pierre, sometimes I sit here all alone by myself, gazing, and gazing, and gazing at that face, till I begin to think your father is looking at me, and smiling at me, and nodding at me, and saying--Dorothea! Dorothea!"

"How strange," said little Pierre, "I think it begins to look at me now, aunt. Hark! aunt, it's so silent all round in this old-fashioned room, that I think I hear a little jingling in the picture, as if the watch-seal was striking against the key--Hark! aunt."

"Bless me, don't talk so strangely, my child."

"I heard mamma say once--but she did not say so to me--that, for her part, she did not like aunt Dorothea's picture; it was not a good likeness, so she said. Why don't mamma like the picture, aunt?"

"My child, you ask very queer questions. If your mamma don't like the picture, it is for a very plain reason. She has a much larger and finer one at home, which she had painted for herself; yes, and paid I don't know how many hundred dollars for it; and that, too, is an excellent likeness, that must be the reason, little Pierre."

And thus the old aunt and the little child ran on; each thinking the other very strange; and both thinking the picture still stranger; and the face in the picture still looked at them frankly, and cheerfully, as if there was nothing kept concealed; and yet again, a little ambiguously and mockingly, as if slyly winking to some other picture, to mark what a very foolish old sister, and what a very silly little son, were growing so monstrously grave and speculative about a huge white-figured neckcloth, a buff vest, and a very gentleman-like and amiable

countenance.

And so, after this scene, as usual, one by one, the fleet years ran on; till the little child Pierre had grown up to be the tall Master Pierre, and could call the picture his own; and now, in the privacy of his own little closet, could stand, or lean, or sit before it all day long, if he pleased, and keep thinking, and thinking, and thinking, and thinking, till by-and-by all thoughts were blurred, and at last there were no thoughts at all.

Before the picture was sent to him, in his fifteenth year, it had been only through the inadvertence of his mother, or rather through a casual passing into a parlor by Pierre, that he had any way learned that his mother did not approve of the picture. Because, as then Pierre was still young, and the picture was the picture of his father, and the cherished property of a most excellent, and dearly-beloved, affectionate aunt; therefore the mother, with an intuitive delicacy, had refrained from knowingly expressing her peculiar opinion in the presence of little Pierre. And this judicious, though half-unconscious delicacy in the mother, had been perhaps somewhat singularly answered by a like nicety of sentiment in the child; for children of a naturally refined organization, and a gentle nurture, sometimes possess a wonderful, and often undreamed of, daintiness of propriety, and thoughtfulness, and forbearance, in matters esteemed a little subtile even by their elders, and self-elected betters. The little Pierre never disclosed to his mother that he had, through another person, become aware of her thoughts

concerning Aunt Dorothea's portrait; he seemed to possess an intuitive knowledge of the circumstance, that from the difference of their relationship to his father, and for other minute reasons, he could in some things, with the greater propriety, be more inquisitive concerning him, with his aunt, than with his mother, especially touching the matter of the chair-portrait. And Aunt Dorothea's reasons accounting for his mother's distaste, long continued satisfactory, or at least not unsufficiently explanatory.

And when the portrait arrived at the Meadows, it so chanced that his mother was abroad; and so Pierre silently hung it up in his closet; and when after a day or two his mother returned, he said nothing to her about its arrival, being still strangely alive to that certain mild mystery which invested it, and whose sacredness now he was fearful of violating, by provoking any discussion with his mother about Aunt Dorothea's gift, or by permitting himself to be improperly curious concerning the reasons of his mother's private and self-reserved opinions of it. But the first time--and it was not long after the arrival of the portrait--that he knew of his mother's having entered his closet; then, when he next saw her, he was prepared to hear what she should voluntarily say about the late addition to its embellishments; but as she omitted all mention of any thing of that sort, he unobtrusively scanned her countenance, to mark whether any little clouding emotion might be discoverable there. But he could discern none. And as all genuine delicacies are by their nature accumulative; therefore this reverential, mutual, but only tacit

forbearance of the mother and son, ever after continued uninvaded. And it was another sweet, and sanctified, and sanctifying bond between them. For, whatever some lovers may sometimes say, love does not always abhor a secret, as nature is said to abhor a vacuum. Love is built upon secrets, as lovely Venice upon invisible and incorruptible piles in the sea. Love's secrets, being mysteries, ever pertain to the transcendent and the infinite; and so they are as airy bridges, by which our further shadows pass over into the regions of the golden mists and exhalations; whence all poetical, lovely thoughts are engendered, and drop into us, as though pearls should drop from rainbows.

As time went on, the chasteness and pure virginity of this mutual reservation, only served to dress the portrait in sweeter, because still more mysterious attractions; and to fling, as it were, fresh fennel and rosemary around the revered memory of the father. Though, indeed, as previously recounted, Pierre now and then loved to present to himself for some fanciful solution the penultimate secret of the portrait, in so far, as that involved his mother's distaste; yet the cunning analysis in which such a mental procedure would involve him, never voluntarily transgressed that sacred limit, where his mother's peculiar repugnance began to shade off into ambiguous considerations, touching any unknown possibilities in the character and early life of the original. Not, that he had altogether forbidden his fancy to range in such fields of speculation; but all such imaginings must be contributory to that pure, exalted idea of his father, which, in his soul, was based upon the known acknowledged facts of his father's life.

V.

If, when the mind roams up and down in the ever-elastic regions of evanescent invention, any definite form or feature can be assigned to the multitudinous shapes it creates out of the incessant dissolvings of its own prior creations; then might we here attempt to hold and define the least shadowy of those reasons, which about the period of adolescence we now treat of, more frequently occurred to Pierre, whenever he essayed to account for his mother's remarkable distaste for the portrait. Yet will we venture one sketch.

Yes--sometimes dimly thought Pierre--who knows but cousin Ralph, after all, may have been not so very far from the truth, when he surmised that at one time my father did indeed cherish some passing emotion for the beautiful young Frenchwoman. And this portrait being painted at that precise time, and indeed with the precise purpose of perpetuating some shadowy testification of the fact in the countenance of the original: therefore, its expression is not congenial, is not familiar, is not altogether agreeable to my mother: because, not only did my father's features never look so to her (since it was afterward that she first became acquainted with him), but also, that certain womanliness of women; that thing I should perhaps call a tender jealousy, a fastidious vanity, in any other lady, enables her to perceive that the glance of the face in the portrait, is not, in some nameless way, dedicated to

herself, but to some other and unknown object; and therefore, is she impatient of it, and it is repelling to her; for she must naturally be intolerant of any imputed reminiscence in my father, which is not in some way connected with her own recollections of him.

Whereas, the larger and more expansive portrait in the great drawing-room, taken in the prime of life; during the best and rosiest days of their wedded union; at the particular desire of my mother; and by a celebrated artist of her own election, and costumed after her own taste; and on all hands considered to be, by those who know, a singularly happy likeness at the period; a belief spiritually reinforced by my own dim infantile remembrances; for all these reasons, this drawing-room portrait possesses an inestimable charm to her; there, she indeed beholds her husband as he had really appeared to her; she does not vacantly gaze upon an unfamiliar phantom called up from the distant, and, to her, well-nigh fabulous days of my father's bachelor life. But in that other portrait, she sees rehearsed to her fond eyes, the latter tales and legends of his devoted wedded love. Yes, I think now that I plainly see it must be so. And yet, ever new conceits come vaporing up in me, as I look on the strange chair-portrait: which, though so very much more unfamiliar to me, than it can possibly be to my mother, still sometimes seems to say--Pierre, believe not the drawing-room painting; that is not thy father; or, at least, is not all of thy father.
Consider in thy mind, Pierre, whether we two paintings may not make only one. Faithful wives are ever over-fond to a certain imaginary image of their husbands; and faithful widows are ever over-reverential to a

certain imagined ghost of that same imagined image, Pierre. Look again, I am thy father as he more truly was. In mature life, the world overlays and varnishes us, Pierre; the thousand proprieties and polished finenesses and grimaces intervene, Pierre; then, we, as it were, abdicate ourselves, and take unto us another self, Pierre; in youth we are, Pierre, but in age we seem. Look again. I am thy real father, so much the more truly, as thou thinkest thou recognizest me not, Pierre. To their young children, fathers are not wont to unfold themselves entirely, Pierre. There are a thousand and one odd little youthful peccadilloes, that we think we may as well not divulge to them, Pierre. Consider this strange, ambiguous smile, Pierre; more narrowly regard this mouth. Behold, what is this too ardent and, as it were, unchastened light in these eyes, Pierre? I am thy father, boy. There was once a certain, oh, but too lovely young Frenchwoman, Pierre. Youth is hot, and temptation strong, Pierre; and in the minutest moment momentous things are irrevocably done, Pierre; and Time sweeps on, and the thing is not always carried down by its stream, but may be left stranded on its bank; away beyond, in the young, green countries, Pierre. Look again. Doth thy mother dislike me for naught? Consider. Do not all her spontaneous, loving impressions, ever strive to magnify, and spiritualize, and deify, her husband's memory, Pierre? Then why doth she cast despite upon me; and never speak to thee of me; and why dost thou thyself keep silence before her, Pierre? Consider. Is there no little mystery here? Probe a little, Pierre. Never fear, never fear. No matter for thy father now. Look, do I not smile?--yes, and with an unchangeable smile; and thus have I unchangeably smiled for many long years gone by,

Pierre. Oh, it is a permanent smile! Thus I smiled to cousin Ralph; and thus in thy dear old Aunt Dorothea's parlor, Pierre; and just so, I smile here to thee, and even thus in thy father's later life, when his body may have been in grief, still--hidden away in Aunt Dorothea's secretary--I thus smiled as before; and just so I'd smile were I now hung up in the deepest dungeon of the Spanish Inquisition, Pierre; though suspended in outer darkness, still would I smile with this smile, though then not a soul should be near. Consider; for a smile is the chosen vehicle for all ambiguities, Pierre. When we would deceive, we smile; when we are hatching any nice little artifice, Pierre; only just a little gratifying our own sweet little appetites, Pierre; then watch us, and out comes the odd little smile. Once upon a time, there was a lovely young Frenchwoman, Pierre. Have you carefully, and analytically, and psychologically, and metaphysically, considered her belongings and surroundings, and all her incidentals, Pierre? Oh, a strange sort of story, that, thy dear old Aunt Dorothea once told thee, Pierre. I once knew a credulous old soul, Pierre. Probe, probe a little--see--there seems one little crack there, Pierre--a wedge, a wedge. Something ever comes of all persistent inquiry; we are not so continually curious for nothing, Pierre; not for nothing, do we so intrigue and become wily diplomatists, and glozers with our own minds, Pierre; and afraid of following the Indian trail from the open plain into the dark thickets, Pierre; but enough; a word to the wise.

Thus sometimes in the mystical, outer quietude of the long country nights; either when the hushed mansion was banked round by the

thick-fallen December snows, or banked round by the immovable white August moonlight; in the haunted repose of a wide story, tenanted only by himself; and sentineling his own little closet; and standing guard, as it were, before the mystical tent of the picture; and ever watching the strangely concealed lights of the meanings that so mysteriously moved to and fro within; thus sometimes stood Pierre before the portrait of his father, unconsciously throwing himself open to all those ineffable hints and ambiguities, and undefined half-suggestions, which now and then people the soul's atmosphere, as thickly as in a soft, steady snow-storm, the snow-flakes people the air. Yet as often starting from these reveries and trances, Pierre would regain the assured element of consciously bidden and self-propelled thought; and then in a moment the air all cleared, not a snow-flake descended, and Pierre, upbraiding himself for his self-indulgent infatuation, would promise never again to fall into a midnight revery before the chair-portrait of his father. Nor did the streams of these reveries seem to leave any conscious sediment in his mind; they were so light and so rapid, that they rolled their own alluvial along; and seemed to leave all Pierre's thought-channels as clean and dry as though never any alluvial stream had rolled there at all.

And so still in his sober, cherishing memories, his father's beatification remained untouched; and all the strangeness of the portrait only served to invest his idea with a fine, legendary romance; the essence whereof was that very mystery, which at other times was so subtly and evilly significant.

But now, now!--Isabel's letter read: swift as the first light that slides from the sun, Pierre saw all preceding ambiguities, all mysteries ripped open as if with a keen sword, and forth trooped thickening phantoms of an infinite gloom. Now his remotest infantile reminiscences--the wandering mind of his father--the empty hand, and the ashen--the strange story of Aunt Dorothea--the mystical midnight suggestions of the portrait itself; and, above all, his mother's intuitive aversion, all, all overwhelmed him with reciprocal testimonies.

And now, by irresistible intuitions, all that had been inexplicably mysterious to him in the portrait, and all that had been inexplicably familiar in the face, most magically these now coincided; the merriness of the one not inharmonious with the mournfulness of the other, but by some ineffable correlativeness, they reciprocally identified each other, and, as it were, melted into each other, and thus interpenetratingly uniting, presented lineaments of an added supernaturalness.

On all sides, the physical world of solid objects now slidingly displaced itself from around him, and he floated into an ether of visions; and, starting to his feet with clenched hands and outstaring eyes at the transfixed face in the air, he ejaculated that wonderful verse from Dante, descriptive of the two mutually absorbing shapes in the Inferno:

"Ah! how dost thou change,

Agnello! See! thou art not double now,

Nor only one!"